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ABSTRACT

When working with limited English proficient (LEP) children who have been mainstreamed into regular elementary school classrooms, teachers must keep in mind that the first order of business is to help the students build a store of knowledge about English--how it sounds, what it looks like in print, and what it means. Teachers will discover that it is not necessary to wait until students can understand and speak English before introducing them to reading and writing in that language. All of the language processes support and clarify each other, but they must be developed in meaningful, full-context situations. The first reading materials should be oral dialogues learned and language experience stories developed through real classroom experiences. Next, the teacher should add repetitive stories and chants, songs, and poems to the repertoire. Listening to tapes while following along with a text and having many opportunities to write and compose will help LEP children to develop an understanding of the language for themselves. Classroom teachers and reading teachers who know language, know children, and know how to bring the two together in meaningful situations can go a long way in helping the LEP child move into the American mainstream. (FL)

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Help for the Reading Teacher: Dealing With Limited English Proficient (LEP) Children in Classroom and Reading Center

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Although the writer is a firm believer in beginning literacy instruction in the native language of the child (Feeley, 1970; 1978; 1979), I have become increasingly aware of stiuations in which this is not possible. Classroom teachers and reading teachers report having to deal with Limited English Proficient (LEP) children in their regular classrooms with no bilingual or English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) teachers to support them.

The reasons given for this "mainstreaming" approach vary. Some say there are too few LEP children in their schools to warrant special programs; others say that finding bilingual teachers for their newcomers (Vietnamese, Thai, Arabic, Korean, to name a few) is next to impossible; still others say that general budget cuts have eroded just about all support services, leaving bottom line responsibility for literacy with the classroom teacher, aided in some cases by the school reading teacher. Many times, when ESL programs do exist, they are placed at secondary levels with the rationale that ". . . here is where it's most needed; the younger children will pick up English in the grades." Consequently, the elementary school teachers are asking for help, particularly in the area of reading instruction.

To respond to these teachers, I culled ideas from the literature of the following related fields: ESL, psycholinguistics, and teaching reading. Also, I visited classrooms in which teachers were coping with the problem using their own "common sense" approaches.

Understanding the Reading Process

All teachers involved in developing literacy, whether or not with LEP sujbects, should have an understanding of the reading process. Psycholinguist Frank Smith (1982) explains reading as an interactive process in which readers use two sources of information to predict meaning which is subsequently confirmed as they continue through a text. The two sources of information are: visual (print that is picked up by the eyes) and non-visual (store of knowledge that is in the brain). In order to make sense of incoming visual information, readers must use the stored knowledge in their brains, particularly any information relative to the selection being read, and their knowledge of the language of the text. One cannot read printed language if one does not have stored knowledge about that language: (1) its grapho-phonic system or how it looks and sounds; (2) its syntactic system or how it is strung together; and (3) its semantic system or stock of words that have specific contextual meanings. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Sources of Information that Readers Use

Visual Information	Non-Visual Information
Print	Stored in the Brain
(picked up by the eyes)	Knowledge of the world
	General
	Specific
	Knowledge of the language
	Grapho-phonic
	Syntatic
	Semantic

To illustrate, I recently picked up a letter written in German to see if I might help a colleague figure out the message. It came from a known German university and probably contained something about education. We had good, clear visual information in that typed communication, but neither of us had any stored information about the German language. We had no stock of meaningful words, no knowledge of how German looks in print, how sounds map onto print, or how Germans structure their language into sentences, and so we could not read the letter.

This is the state most second-language learners are in when they enter our English-speaking schools. Teaching them to read is not the same as teaching English-speaking beginners. Linguists remind us that children bring to school a wealth of language knowledge that was developed naturally at home. They have vocabularies of 5,000 words or more. They know the sounds of English and how words are strung together; for example, they say "I like you" and not "Like I you." Teachers can use all this language knowledge to help children move into reading their language. When dealing with children whose first language is not English, teachers must help them build up a store of knowledge about English.

Language Acquisition and Language Learning

Language acquisition generally refers to "picking up" a language informally, as one learns one's native language by being in a meaningful language environment with supportive feedback from family members. Language learning, on the other hand, generally refers to formal instruction in a language, learning "about" that language (Krashen, 1981). This is an interesting way of viewing second-language learning in that it helps teachers understand their role in moving LEP students toward English literacy.

While it is true that children will acquire or "pick up" English from their peers and neighbors, they still need the formal language learning experiences, especially those related to reading, provided by teachers. Kashen (1981) says that although fluency is related to what's acquired, formal language learning serves as a monitor, helping the LEP child to sort out the chunks of English learned informally and to self-correct when necessary.

For example, when visiting a school in a bilingual urban area, I asked a second-grader where her friend, Maria, was. She answered, "Maria no is here," mixing the Spanish negative into her newly acquired English. Right after this exchange, in her reading group she encountered the sentence, "Carlos is not in school." She looked up at me immediately and said, "Maria is not here, too." The formal "book language" helped her to monitor her productive English.

While second-language learners need opportunities for both acquiring and learning about English, all language learning should be kept in full context situations since this is the way all humans develop their native language. Isolated drills on vocabulary or grammatical situations or phonic elements do not add to the stored knowledge base because they are not meaningful.

When to Begin Reading in English

Proponents of the Audio-Lingual method (ALM) for second-language learning have always stressed much listening and speaking before reading and writing are introduced. They were following the progression of native language acquisition. But, second-language learners, particularly those encountered in the elementary school, are older and can learn to read English from the start. Lado (1977) calls for earlier introduction of reading, citing that people often ask, "How do you spell it?" when they want to sort out new words or names they've heard others use. He says there is no research that supports

delaying reading instruction, calling this an "untested hypothesis."

In fact, rather than the initial stress on oral English suggested by ALM sources, Postovsky (1977) argues for a longer, "massive," listening period, citing research that shows that it works. Since listening and reading are both receptives processes, they can support each other.

Goodman, Goodman, and Flores (1979) add to this newer view, saying,

> We believe that bilingual learners need not be fully proficient in both productive and receptive English to learn to read English and to get considerable meaning from their reading. . . So we see our second-language readers learning English as they read it. They can sometimes comprehend what they cannot yet express. (p. 33).

Implications for Instruction

There are several implications for instructional materials and methods that classroom teachers and/or reading teachers can draw from the above insights into second-language learning.

Very First Reading Materials

There is much support (Finocchiaro, 1964; Rivers and Temperley, 1978; Rodriques and White, 1981) for tying the first reading directly to dialogues or short exchanges of familiar expressions that the children are learning orally. These can be classroom commands like "Open your book" or early dialogues like:

Child 1: Hello. My name is _____.
What's yours?

Child 2: My name is _____.
Where do you live?

Child 3: I live at _____.
And you?

These exchanges can be started by the reading teacher, but to be effective, they must be practiced over and over. This is best done by assigning the LEP student a buddy in the classroom who will go through the routines, alternating roles. The dialogues should be printed or typed (primer typewriter) and covered with clear plastic. In this way, they can be handled often and used again and again.

Zintz (1980) suggests developing sentences which will allow several replacements in certain slots. An example might be:

How many	boy girls chairs desks people pictures	are in this room?

Again, while this is done orally first with the teacher or buddy, it can immediately be presented in print with the question and fillers on one side of a plastic-covered piece of oaktag and, facing it, appropriate answer statements such as: There are _____ in this room.

Other beginning materials can be developed through the Language Experience Approach (LEA). In this approach, the teacher supplies an experience, talks about it with the students, writing down some of their own language. Together they read back the encoded message with individuals finally taking turns reading it. The conventions of English print, a sight vocabulary, and the rudiments of phonics can be taught through LEA stories (Stauffer, 1980; Hall, 1981).

LEA has been widely recommended for use with LEP students because reading vocabulary can be directly linked with concepts and oral language just encountered (Feeley, 1979; Rigg, 1981; Coady, 1981). Any real experiences that come up in the regular classroom (trips, experiments, cooking and art

projects) can be turned into simple LEA materials for second language learners.

Pictures can also be used to teach LEP children English words for familiar concepts. Sentences can be generated about the pictures in LEA fashion and used to caption the pictures. According to Ventriglia (1982) visuals are one of the main avenues for "bridging" concept labels from one language to another. But, if the new labels are to "stick," they should be developed in categories; for example, pictures of mother, father, baby, brother, sister can be discussed together under the cluster title "family." Simple stories can be written around these themes.

A more structured form of LEA that is often found in primary classrooms, the daily recording of the day, weather, and notable events, lends itself well to second language instruction. In one class, I observed the teacher cut the "news" sentences into strips and give them to students to keep at their desks. The next day, when a similar chart was constructed, they brought their strips up to compare them with the new sentences. This group composing, reading back, and comparing helped the LEP children learn to recognize the days of the week, weather words, and common sentence patterns.

The Next Step: Predictable Texts

After introducing reading in English through print related to language being learned orally, teachers can choose very predictable texts with repetitive syntax and words for LEP children (Renault, 1981). These may be traded books for beginners like the "First Read-By-Myself Books with Ten Word Texts" (Wolcott, 1975), or they may be pre-primers from any available basal series.

First, the vocabulary and story line should be developed thoroughly through pictures and gestures. Then the complete story should be read to the LEP children as they follow along. Some may require a few reading or a read-along-with-me trial before trying it alone. They should be encouraged

to practice reading it to peers in school and to family at home. (One Korean mother I met told me through an interpreter how proud she was to see and hear her son read an English book. I think she was trying to learn from his text, too).

Renault (1981) suggests having children follow up their reading of these first stories by illustrating them and completing sentences from the text containing very predictable deletions.

The above procedures are generally recommended, as needed, if teachers are using basal materials with LEP learners at any level.

Listening and Reading

LEP children can learn much about the rhythms and sounds of English by listening to taped stories. When the tapes are accompanied by print versions, they can also learn about the graphic counterparts of those sounds. If the print versions are picture books, cues to the meanings are also provided.

Sometimes called "reading by immersion" (Hoskisson, 1974; Chomsky, 1975), this approach has been suggested as a good way to get English-speaking beginners to read. Renault (1981) offers it as a sound reading strategy for second-language learners as well.

Teachers can tape very predictable picture books or puchase cassette-book and/or record-book sets from sources such as Weston Woods (Weston, Connecticut) and Scholastic Press (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey).

As follow-up activities to look-and-listen, Renault (1981) suggests having children retell the stories, reread the books silently for practice, and complete simple cloze exercises that may be made from the text.

Chants, Songs and Poems

The McCrackens (1979) have successfully used chants to introduce children to reading. "Good morning, Sun" is chanted, and gradually the print that accompanies the sounds is introduced on strips of chart paper that are placed in a clear plastic pocket chart.

LEP children can learn English through similar procedures. Charts and songs are easy to remember because of the repetition and rhythm (Ventriglia, 1982). Traditional songs like "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush," "Clementine," and "Old McDonald" are examples of songs that can be used. Singing songs in unison with English-speaking peers also helps the LEP children to feel like part of the group.

Jazz Chants for Children. (Graham, 1979) is a fine collection of chants, songs, and poems especially written for LEP children. Recently, I used one of the songs, "Hello, Ernie," with some newly arrived Asian children. After we had sung the song together several times, I borrowed the McCrackens' idea and displayed the song line by line on oaktag strips in a pocket chart so the children could "match" the words in their heads with the print. It was a pleasant way to learn to say, read, and understand some basic American language chunks.

Children don't mind singing songs and chanting poems again and again. The practice builds up automaticity. The important thing to remember is to add the print, either via charts, songsheets, or overhead transparencies so that the aural-oral experience supports the learning-to-read experience.

The Writing Connection

As soon as LEP children have learned to write the alphabet, writing should become an integral part of the language learning program. At first, they can copy parts of familiar dialogues, LEA stories, and group-developed news accounts.

Dictation of very familiar language (dialogues or sentences from materials they have read) is highly recommended (Finocchiaro, 1964; Maculaitis and Sheraga, 1981; Rivers and Temperly, 1978). Maulaitis and Sheraga suggest having children copy the dictation selection the first day, paying attention to spelling, punctuation, and other mechanics. The next day, the teacher reads the entire selection and then rereads, one or two words at a time, as the children write. Having the children compare the new copy to the original encourages self-correction.

Younger children can make picture dictionaries while older children can make personal dictionaires of words that are important to them. I saw a ten-year-old Korean girl's dictionary of her "own" English terms, loosely alphabetized, and defined by a mixture of English words and Korean ideographs. She was very proud of her collection.

Goodman, Goodman, and Flores (1980) suggest that second-language learners become authors themselves since, "Writing brings written language components to a more conscious level" (p. 37). Writing can be stimulated by pictures or by class "story starters" discussions. One second-grade class I visited was writing about "The Day I Found Five Hundred Dollars." A newly arrived Japanese girl understood enough of the discussion to write her story in Japanese. Another girl, who was bilingual, translated the story for the teacher who wrote the English version. Both versions were mounted side by side and illustrated by the proud author.

Conclusions

When working with LEP children who have been mainstreamed into heterogeneous elementary school classrooms, teachers must keep in mind that the first order of the day is to help them build up a store of knowledge about English -- how it sounds, what it looks like in print, what is means. It's not necessary to wait until they can understand and speak English (many will be very slow to speak) before introducing reading and writing. All the language processes support and clarify each other. But they must be developed in meaningful, full-context situations.

First reading materials should be the first oral dialogues learned and LEA stories developed through real classroom experiences. Next, very predictable, repetitive stories and chants, songs, and poems can be added to the repertoire.

Listening to tapes while following the text and having many opportunities to write and compose help LEP children to "put it all together" for themselves.

Classroom teachers and reading teachers who know language, know children, and who know how to bring the two together in meaningful situations that always make sense, can go a long way toward helping the LEP child move into the American mainstream.

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